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ABSTRACT

While each English department will establish its own set of assumptions appropriate for its objectives and programs, the new rhetoric can bring some coherence to the teaching of writing and literature by providing students with reliable strategies for reading literature as well as writing. In teaching literature teachers need to demonstrate the relevance of reading literature, show students how to pay attention to their individual reading processes and their active participation in interpretation, and provide students with heuristics for reading complex literary texts and solving problems that come from their reading. A problem solving approach stresses the process of reading literary works, readers' responses to literary works, problem identification and resolution through systematic inquiry procedures, and verification of interpretations of works. Using the tagmemic rhetorical theory, practical strategies can be developed for students to deal with the parts of a work, the dynamic interrelations among parts of a work, the internal arrangement of parts, and the work itself in relation to larger contexts. It is thus possible to conceive of a new literary studies pedagogy that is compatible with the new writing pedagogy, and to draw on the wealth of available research to revitalize literature instruction. (EL)

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A COHERENT PEDAGOGY FOR TEACHING LITERATURE AND WRITING

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(Presented at 1984 Conference on College Composition and Communication, Minneapolis, MN, March 21-23, 1985)

The context for developing a new pedagogy for literary studies courses is circumscribed by the large problems that we are resolving in our departments and curricula. These problems include (1) the tensions between faculty who teach writing and those who teach literature, (2) the lack of coherence among the disciplines in our departments, especially between writing and literary studies, (3) literacy problems, specifically the problem that students are unable to read complex literature with insight; it is a form of illiteracy that much of our population is unable to read anything more complex that a Harlequin romance (not that I have anything against Harlequin romances, just as I have nothing against eating popcorn, but a steady diet of popcorn is certainly deficient), and (4) a general view among students that literature courses lack relevance. What also points up the need to take a close look at literary studies pedagogy and curriculum is the welcome revitalization of our writing programs. Designed on the basis of a new paradigm, writing pedagogy is process oriented and takes a problem solving approach to writing. Writing pedagogy emphasizes the writing process over the written product and invention strategies over editing-for-correctness. Similar re-emphasis is appropriate for literary studies pedagogy.

My basic assumption in developing a new literature pedagogy is that the

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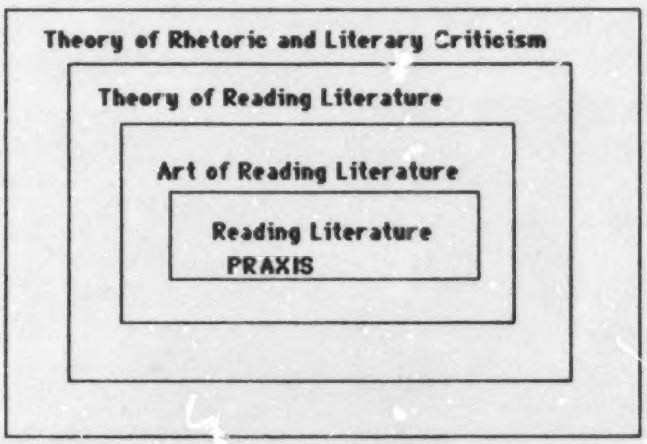
best pedagogy and curriculum rest on a solid theoretical base and clearly-articulated set of assumptions. In our writing pedagogy we have abandoned the old admonition to "practice, practice, practice" for an approach rooted in praxis, i.e., a theory-driven practice approach to writing. As we know, practice for its own sake and practice without theory-based direction is relatively futile. The same can be applied to reading complex literature. Admonishing students to "read, read, read" without teaching them how to read literature or how to understand their individual reading processes can result in efforts as frustrating as attempting to write without good strategies and knowledge of the writing process. Reading literature, the praxis or act of reading, should be rooted in an art of reading literature, which, in turn, should be rooted in a theory of reading literature. A theory of reading literature can be based in the new rhetoric and in selected literary criticism. The following diagram illustrates.



To engage students in reading literary works, we need to teach them how to read, an art of reading. This art of reading should be compatable with the art of writing that we teach. The reading process and the writing process are, after all, closely related. It is reasonable to expect that strategies

employed for one can be adapted to the other.

The new rhetoric offers us the means to address our problems and develop compatible and coherent writing and literature pedagogies. The new rhetoric can bring some coherence to the teaching of writing and literature by providing students with reliable strategies for reading literature, as well as for writing. As we have built student confidence in writing by teaching writing strategies and demystifying the writing process, we can build student self confidence in tackling complex literary texts by emphasizing readers' responses, an understanding of the reading process, and strategies for reading literature in the study of literature. The best place to begin bringing the teaching of literature and writing together is at the department level. A clearly articulated theory base provides the foundation on which to build pedagogy, programs, courses, and strategies. In this paper I first present an illustration of what that theory base might look like. Then, I propose a theory of reading literature and some suggestions for creating strategies for the practice of reading literature.

Department-level Theory Base and Assumptions

One of the major benefits of the new writing pedagogy is the wealth of research available to us. Translating theoretical research into practice, while a challenge, is essential to coherent English programs. Moreover, we need to debate and discuss the research, articulate department-level theory bases, and establish sets of assumptions to underlie the programs and pedagogy in our departments. This is especially important for writing and literary studies curricula. The new rhetoric (process-oriented rhetoric, problem-solving rhetoric) can be central in this theory base. While each department will establish its own set of assumptions appropriate for its

objectives and programs, the new rhetoric might be common ground for all literature and writing programs.

As an example, the assumptions my department established illustrate how theory can move toward practice on a departmental level. By redefining, clarifying and articulating who we are and what we stand for as a department, we are able to bring coherence to an English program that has options in literary studies, communication arts-media studies, professional writing, and teacher education. The chief assumptions that inform our program are these:

> First among the assumptions is a conception of rhetoric "that implies that we are all citizens of an extraordinarily diverse and disturbed world, that the 'truths' we live by are tentative and subject to change, that we must be discoverers of new truths as well as preservers and transmitters of the old, and that enlightened cooperation is the preeminent ethical goal of communication" (Young, Becker, Pike, Rhetoric: Discovery and Change).

> Second, the study of discourse is chief among the concerns of the English department. Discourse "refers to the full text (when feasible) of an oral or written situation; it does not denote necessarily a rationally or logically coherent content; the discourse can be directed to any aim of language or refer to any kind of reality; it can be a poem, a conversation,a tragedy, a joke, a seminar discussion, a full-lenght history, a periodical article, an interview, a sermon, a TV ad," or a business letter, a slide-tape program, a television program, a corporate report, a novel (Kinneavy, A Theory of Discourse).

> Third, while certain aspects of the creative process, i.e., process of discovery, may not be subject to conscious control, process oriented rhetoric provides the means for consciously controlling much of the creative process; the strategies (heuristics) for achieveing this control can be taught (Young,

Concepts of Art and the Teaching of Writing;" Perkins, The Mind's Best Work).

Fourth, process oriented rhetoric provides a basis for fostering higher order reasoning skills (for example, problem solving, synthesis, analysis, decision making), for developing transfer learning among the parts of the English program (for example, between writing and literary studies or between writing and media studies), and for meeting simultaneously the ends of liberal education and the practical concerns of professional career preparation (Bruner, The Process of Education).

These assumptions and the theory base they encompass provide coherence in the department and departmental programs and pedagogy, and they establish and an appropriate context for developing a new literary studies pedagogy.

A Theory of Reading Literature

Within the context of this department-level theory and set of assumptions a theory of reading literature might address three specific areas. Realizing, of course, that other objectives could be addressed as one developes a theory base for an art of reading literature and for reading practice/praxis, I have identified these areas as those that respond in particular to the kinds of problems we need to resolve, listed at the beginning of this discussion, and as areas where links between writing and literary studies pedagogy can be established. First, we should present literature and literary works to students in ways that demonstrate the relevance of reading literature; we can define relevance as occurring when the literary work and the experience of reading it can be seen to relate to the world and the ways

people interact in it. Second, we need to teach students how to pay attention to their individual reading processes and how they as readers actively participate in the process of interpretation. This includes paying attention to what readers bring to a text and how that influences and shapes their interpretations of a work. Third, we must provide students with heuristics for reading complex literary texts and for solving the problems that come from their reading.

In general, what I propose is a problem solving approach to reading literature. With this approach students move systematically through four stages: Reading/Response, Problem Identification, Problem Solving/Inquiry, and Verification. While the approach is systematic, it is not a lock-step procedure; one may return to and repeat parts of it as necessary. It is an approach that stresses the process of reading literary works, readers' responses to literary works, problem identification and resolution through systematic inquiry procedures, and verification of interpretations of works. It provides students with strategies and procedures for reading complex literary texts and practice using those strategies to develop their reading skills.

The theory which underlies this art of reading extends into several major areas of research: Kenneth Burke's literary criticism, Reader Response criticism, research into the reading process (Bransford; Flower), and Tagmemic Rhetoric (Young). The strategies, procedures, and heuristics which students learn and practice extend from this theory base. Many of the strategies, most notably those developed from tagmemic rhetoric, in general, and from tagmemic invention, in particular, reflect those which students use in their writing practice. In the remaining part of this dicussion I will focus only on selected theoretical aspects of Burke's criticism, reader response

criticism, and tagmemic rhetoric to illustrate how theory can extend into reading praxis.

Literature as problem solving means approaching the reading of literature from a perspective that assumes that literary works embody repeatable life situations and ways people resolve them. Essentially, this is a form of mimetic criticism, "the exploration of art as . . . an imitation of aspects of the universe" (Abrams, 1958, pp. 8ff.). This assumption about literature stems, in part, from Kenneth Burke's discussions of literature, notably his essay, "Literature as Equipment for Living" (1957, pp. 253-62). Burke proposes a sociological criticism based on an analysis of proverbs as "typical, recurrent situations." He explains that because "people find certain social relationships recurring so frequently . . . they must 'have a word for it'" (p. 253). Burke observes that social structures "give rise to 'type' situations, subtle subdivisions of the relationships involved in competitive and cooperative acts" (p. 253). Proverbs "chart" these "type" situations. Burke then extends this analysis of proverbs to the field of literature: he asks, "Could the most complex and sophisticated works of art legitimately be considered somewhat as 'Proverbs writ large'" (p. 256)? Burke summarizes: "The point of view might be phrased in this way: Proverbs are <u>strategies</u> for dealing with <u>situations</u>. Insofar as situations are typical and recurrent in a given social structure, people develop names for them and strategies for handling them" (p. 256). Thus, literary works, then, can "be treated as <u>equipments for living</u> that size up situations in various ways and in keeping with correspondingly various attitudes" (p. 262). Burke's approach to literature provides a base from which students can develop a sense of the relevance of literature.

To illustrate how to extend this theory into practice, an exercise like

the following might be used with students. The aim of the exercise is to show students how proverbs work: namely, that proverbs emerge from a culture as a way of summing up typical life situations and how people prefer to deal with them. Literary works function in a similar, albeit more complex, way.

Discussion Exercise: Proverbs

In all societies certain social relationships and situations recur so frequently that people develop words or names for them. Proverbs chart these situations and indicate strategies that people use for dealing with the situations. Thus, proverbs are strategies for dealing with recurring social situations. To understand the validity of how proverbs work, consider the proverbs listed below. Choose two that appeal to you and make a list of specific situations that illustrate the validity of the proverb as a summation of a recurring life situation. Choose examples from your experience, your knowledge of life and the world, and from history. As you do this, keep in mind that literary works, like proverbs, embody typical human situations and the strategies people have used in those situations.

You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink.

A stitch in time saves nine.

Hatred stirs up strife, but love conquers all.

To err is human, to forgive divine.

Reader response criticism offers a theoretical perspective that can help us to enhance students' involvement with literature. Using, for example, Louise Rosenblatt's seminal work on reading literature (Literature as Exploration, 1938, rev. 1968, and "Coda: A Performing Art," 1970, pp.661-72), we can present the reading of literary works as a "participation, a personal experience," a transaction between reader and text and between reader and the world. Rosenblatt stresses that literary works are extensions and

amplifications of life. They are not simply mirrors or reports of life, nor is literature primarily a chronicle of a language or a society. Rosenblatt comments, "Imaginative literature happens when we focus our attention on what we are sensing, thinking, feeling, structuring, in the act of response to the particular words in their particular order" (p. 663). Thus, reading literature is a synthesizing process: we constantly select and assemble appropriate responses, deal with the structure of the whole, make and revise inferences and assumptions, and discover and articulate ambiguities, questions and problems. Not only are student readers unaware that this kind of process and interaction is a key part of the art of reading complex literature, but also they are generally unresponsive to it happening as they read.

To put students in touch with their responses to literary texts and to begin to make them aware of problems that demand further attention in the process of interpreting a work, we might use a practice strategy like the following. I point out that the theory base for this strategy extends beyond reader response criticism to research into reading protocols and to aspects of tagmemic rhetoric's problem solving theory. Nevertheless, it illustrates how theory can extend into praxis.

Procedure: Understanding Your Reading Process

> One reason why students experience difficulties comprehending literary works is due to a lack of understanding of what goes on during the reading process. This procedure should make you more aware of your own reading process, specifically of what goes on between you and the text as you read and after you complete your initial reading. Also, this procedure asks you to pay attention to your response to the work and to the kinds of assumptions you make about the work. As a reader, what you bring to a literary work influences how you respond. It is important to know what

those influences are.

1) The Protocol--While you are reading the work, write down what is going on in your mind as you progress through the work. Try to capture your intellectual, emotional, psychological, and physical responses as they happen. Also, note what in the work elicits these responses from you. Note the assumptions and inferences you make as you read and where they change, if they do change. A word on technique: don't try to write in full sentences and paragraphs; jot down in note form your ideas, feelings, assumptions, etc.

2) The Response--When you finish reading the work, or a significant chunk of a long work, write a coherent response to the work. Use you notes as a basis for writing a reaction to the work. Comment on what you seem to understand about the work; raise questions and, if possible, speculate on ways you might begin to interpret the work. The response should not come to any conclusions, but rather record your immediate reaction to the work.

3) Problem Identification--After you have written your response to the work and have had a little time to think and review your notes, make a list of the problems that come to mind as you think about this work. Try to state the problems as clearly as you can and write down what you need to find out in order to resolve each problem. Number the problems as you go along. As you do this, you may want to re-read parts of the work and/or change some of your initial impressions and ideas. Feel free to do so; just make note of your thoughts. This is all part of the process of reading literature.

With these procedures, then, students begin to see how literature gives rise to problematic responses, i.e., inconsistencies of some type or tentative awarenesses that cause uneasiness in the reader. By examining their responses, students can identify more explicit problems and points to pursue further. They, then, can return to the text with heuristics to conduct

inquiries that may lead to interpretations of the work. At least three types of problems may emerge from an analysis of reader responses: (1) a problem within the literary work itself, in the situation and strategy/life situation of the work; (2) a problem that arises between the literary work and the reader's understanding of it, such as problems related to comprehending and expressing themes of works; and (3) a problem that places the work in a larger context, such as other literary works, a culture, the author's life and/or other works, or a literary period. Tagmemic rhetoric is perhaps the most compatible system of rhetoric for dealing with problems because in addition to its own powerful strategies for analysis, tagmemic invention can invoke useful features of other rhetorical systems and of various critical approaches to literature in the inquiry process. We can teach students to employ tagmemic inquiry procedures and heuristics in their reading praxis. Tagmemic rhetoric offers systematic, reliable, complete procedures for solving problems during the process of reading complex literature.

Two aspects of tagmemic rhetoric can illustrate how this works: (1) particle--wave--field analysis and (2) the assumption that a literary work is a complex system. First, tagmemic invention, as explained by Richard Young, is "an art of conducting original inquiries into situations that are perceived to be in some way problematic. . . . The procedure asks the inquirer to change his mode of perception of the same unit of experience, viewing it as a static, sharply defined particle, as a wave of activity, and as a field of relationships" (1970, p. 61). Young stresses that any particular perspective by itself is incomplete and "reflects specific needs or biases." Finally, "in each mode the inquirer [also] is asked to note the unit's contrastive features, variations, and distributions" (p. 61). Through this investigative process

students stand a good chance of discovering inform. tion they may already know and find new information that can lead to solutions to problems. Young considers tagmemic invention essential not only to the writing process, but also to the analysis of literature "as a step toward the restoration of an integrated conception of language studies, a conception we lost with the repudiation of the classical paradigm" (p. 62). Thus, tagmemic invention gives us a link between the writing and reading processes, and between writing and literary studies pedagogy.

Second, tagmemic rhetoric takes the view that literary works are "complex systems," systems comprised of numerous parts that interact in non-simple ways, systems that exist on the page and in the mind of the reader. Young points out, "when we say that a literary work is more than the sum of its parts, we are saying . . . that 'given the properties of its parts and the laws of their interaction, it is not a trivial matter to infer the properties of the whole'" (p. 63). In other words, "understanding the theme [of a work] and in some sense the meaning of the work as a whole, requires the apprehension of a semantic field that relates the parts to each other and to the world beyond the work" (p. 63). The theme, then, of a work cannot easily be reduced to a static summary sentence, but rather should be conceived of as a dynamic system of interrelated parts. Tagmemic analysis, tagmemic "field perspective" in particular, provides a way into these multiple systems of relationships in a work. Young argues that "a field analysis which relates semantic units in three interdependent systems (sequence, class, and matrix) not only leads one into analyses of the conventional elements of plot and motif [in fiction, for example], but provides insight into theme as well" (p.64). We can develop, then, from tagmemic rhetorical theory practical strategies

for students to use to resolve their problems and to discover and verify thematic interpretations of literary works. With these strategies students can systematically deal with the parts of a work, the dynamic interrelations among the parts of a work, the internal arrangement of parts, and the work itself in relation to larger contexts. The discussion of these particular strategies however, is the matter for another paper.

I would like to conclude here with two points. First, it is possible to conceive of a new literary studies pedagogy that is compatible with the new writing pedagogy, and thus, achieve some coherence in English departments, literature and writing programs, and writing and literary studies pedagogy. And, second, a new praxis-oriented approach to literary studies can draw on the wealth of research available to us and revitalize the teaching of literature in much the same way that writing instruction has been renewed by the new rhetoric. On this basis, then, we can develop effective strategies our students can use to read complex literature with insight.

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